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ABSTRACT

Problems encountered at Black Hawk High School, Wisconsin, in an attempt to expand the French curriculum to include a level 3 and a level 4 course are examined in this article. Solutions to the difficulties caused by inadequate classroom space and insufficient funds lead the author to propose the elimination of the traditional, advanced-course titles and methods of instruction in favor of an individualized, flexible instructional program comprised of 16 study units which focus on contemporary issues considered to be relevant to student interests. General program design, methods of evaluation, and a two-year curriculum are described in this article. (RL)

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INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAM: A PROPOSAL FOR AN ADVANCED FRENCH CURRICULUM

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I. The Need For Change

The need to evaluate and to change the present Black Hawk High School French curriculum is vital. Presently the program consists of French I and French II. In the fall of 1971, a new course, French III, will be added. It is hoped that eventually the program will be expanded to include French IV. However, the expansion of the program to include French III and French IV has caused and will cause a variety of problems.

The first obstacle to the expanded program is that of scheduling the new courses into the school's traditional eight period school day. Our frustrated guidance counselor informs us that there are already too many courses, too few rooms and teachers, and not enough hours in the day--there is simply no place for new curriculum offerings. Moreover, the teacher-pupil ratio in these advanced courses is so low that the classes simply can not be justified. The students themselves have difficulties scheduling the courses because of conflicts with required subjects. This fall, in an effort to accomodate all concerned, French III is scheduled the same hour as a section of French I; this is hardly a solution.

Another hindrance to the expanded program is the lack of facilities at Black Hawk High School. The high school building is old and not large enough to handle its growing enrollment. Classrooms are in constant use. There is no language laboratory, as the "French Room" is used by other teachers for other courses. Since a building project is anticipated in the near future, it would be impractical to install any kind of permanent language lab arrangement.

A third difficulty to overcome would be that of materials for the new courses. The school owns no texts, tapes, films, etc., specifically designed for use in such courses, and in these days of tight school budgets, it is difficult to find funds to purchase these new materials.

Despite these problems, we must find a way to expand the program. Why? Because student interest in the foreign language program at B.H.H.S. is tremendous. Enrollment in French I for the 1971-1972 school year is triple that of the previous year. Of the eight students who were enrolled in French II last year and did not graduate, six are planning to take French III--75% of the class want to continue their language study. A desire this strong to learn is the ultimate goal of education. Something must be done to facilitate their interest in learning.

After careful study of the situation, it seems logical to consider some kind of individualized, independent study as a possible answer to the problem. A program of individualized, independent study will challenge these students and allow them to dwell upon areas of personal interest and weakness. Furthermore, a program of this type is feasible and applicable at B.H.H.S.

II. Proposal: Advanced French

A solution to the difficulties involved in expanding the foreign language program at B.H.H.S. could evolve from a modified individualized, independent study program. The following suggestions would form the basis of the proposed program, which would be conducted on the advanced levels.

The first step in the design of this new curriculum would be to eliminate the labels--French III and French IV. These courses and course titles would be combined and referred to as Advanced French. This would mean both classes would be scheduled in one period of the school day, thus alleviating many headaches for the school's guidance counselor. Moreover, this procedure would sufficiently increase the enrollment in Advanced French to make offering the subject practical and justifiable.

Secondly, I would suggest not adopting a common text for all students. Instead I would propose a common course content. The year would be divided into eight units or topics of study, each approximately four weeks in length. These topics would be of high student interest value. During each unit the student would be allowed to do "research" on a project in which he is interested and which is related to the overall unit topic. The following year eight new topics of study would be used for the class. In actuality then, the course would be composed of sixteen units of study which would repeat on a two-year cycle.

This type of program would solve at least three of our pressing problems. First of all, there would not be the expense of buying a quantity of new texts, tapes, workbooks, etc. for the two new courses. All the students could use the same materials presently available. Future funds could be used to

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enlarge upon the present materials. Secondly, each student will be able to "do his own thing". Each one could study what he is most motivated to learn. The class would be fun, but beneficial to each person with very little boring repetition. The challenge and satisfaction of "doing his own thing" should definitely keep the student interested in staying in the language program. A third benefit of the program is that the student who simply can not take Advanced French "sixth hour" can come to the room and work with the materials during "seventh hour" when he has a study hall. Thus, he is able to continue his study of French instead of becoming a "drop-out" because of difficulties in scheduling the course.

A third facet of the proposed program for Advanced French introduces flexibility in the student's prerequisites and credits for the course. The Advanced French course would be open to any student who has completed French II. A student who completed French II but who could not or did not choose to enroll in Advanced French the next semester (in the fall), would be eligible to enroll in the course the spring semester, the third nine weeks or the next year if he so desired. He could do this without fear of being way behind the other students because each would be working independently. If he felt he needed some "remedial work", he could easily fit that into his own agenda. Thus, the student would feel free to take the course as it fit into his own high school program. The flexibility in taking the course when the student could, would apply within the eight-unit year and credit would be given accordingly. The student could take as few as one unit (1/8 credit), as many as eight units (1 credit), or any combination in between. This would place the responsibility of planning and the freedom of choice on the student himself. As a junior or senior in high school, it is a responsibility and a freedom he must begin to cope with in preparation for the future. This course could serve as a training program to this end.

An objection to this program might stem from the fact that for some students the interval between French courses might be anywhere from four weeks to more than a year, thus promoting the fear that they have forgotten too much. However, for years we have worried little about the summer break, and it is doubtful that a student would forget more in a year than he does in a summer. Therefore, it is best to sacrifice our phobias about a continuous sequence and concentrate our concern and efforts on keeping the student in touch with the language and learning French rather than being a drop-out. The proposed curriculum would do just that--maintain skills and interest in French at Black Hawk High School.

III. Outline of Course Content and Instruction Procedures

The basic organization of the year's study would be as follows. Each year of the cycle would begin with a Basic Skills and Grammar Review. This unit will provide the students with the opportunity to review grammar and skills after the summer vacation period. It will also serve as a time of orientation to the units and course of study which will follow. It is presently planned that as much as possible of these units will be "taught" through the vehicle of a unipac, which allow the student to progress rapidly in his areas of strength and study in depth his weakest areas.

After this first unit, the student will develop and research his own "project" for each following unit. The emphasis will be on "doing something" at the end of the unit, rather than the student writing a "term paper". At the beginning of the unit, the student will complete an "Application for Independent Study" and schedule an interview with the teacher to discuss his project. When these preliminary procedures are completed, he will begin his "study". At the conclusion of the unit, the entire class (as many as possible) will meet together and each student will "do something" as evidence of his study. This sharing of learning will be of great value to each individual. The student will be expected to include some kind of suitable written and oral product at the completion of each project.

It is obvious that these requirements will develop and broaden the student's cultural knowledge, reading, speaking, and writing skills. To insure continual progress in the areas of pronunciation and listening comprehension, some time during each week, the student will be asked to do lab work appropriate to his course of study. The practice tapes/records will be located and specific assignments agreed on as the student organizes his project. Since correct use of grammar is vital to the development of good compositions and conversations, a certain grammar concept will be chosen by the students and teacher based on student need and performance in the grammar review at the beginning of the year. This topic will be studied by all the students during the unit--each one will study to the degree he feels necessary. Midway through the unit the students will be tested but no grade will be recorded. Students will then have a period of time to re-study any personal difficulties. A final test on the concept will be taken by each student when he feels adequately prepared; this grade will be recorded.

It is hoped that through this plan the students will experience a great degree of contact with the language. It is hoped that this contact will be relevant to the student's needs and interests. It is further hoped that this contact will be a challenging, beneficial and varied approach to learning the French language and culture.

It is anticipated that variations from the basic outline might occur. Some of the units might have to be replaced or modified as dictated by materials available or as suggested by the students. Variations from the basic plan may occur if all students finish a unit earlier than expected. In that case, an ad-lib unit--perhaps producing a French play--might be added. This same flexibility might be needed if students

need more time to finish. This might mean that projects for the next unit would be shortened in order to provide the extra time to finish the prior unit. Still another variation might be a teacher-taught mini course on the topic to be covered. Flexibility, student interest, and learning French will be the prime considerations whatever the variation or the method.

IV. Methods of Evaluation

The following methods of evaluation and grading will be employed for Advanced French. These methods were developed within the limits of the present grading requirements of Black Hawk High School.

A. The student's nine-week mark will be based on:

1. project (s) (approximate value--4/6)
2. grammar test (s) (approximate value--1/6)
3. lab work (approximate value--1/6)

B. The student's semester mark will be based on:

1. the two nine-week grades (approximate value--4/5)
2. a semester exam (approximate value--4/5)

The semester exam will cover the following material:
a) grammar concepts studied in conjunction with each unit
b) reading comprehension
c) listening comprehension
d) pronunciation
e) free composition
These areas will be tested since the material will be common to all, regardless of individual courses of study.

C. Evaluation of the entire program will be conducted at mid-semester and at the end of the year. A questionnaire will be developed to obtain student reaction to the new curriculum.

V. Two-Year Curriculum for Advanced French

	Semester I				Semester II			
1971-1972	Basic Skills and Grammar Review	French Contribution to the Humanities	French Cooking	A Trip in France	Teen-agers in France Today	Contemporary French Readings	French Speaking Colonies	Who's Who in France
1972-1973	Basic Skills and Grammar Review	History of France	Writing and Understanding French Correspondence	France Today	French Cinema and News Media	Readings in Beginning French Literature	Geography of France	Recreation in France

Course Descriptions

BASIC SKILLS AND GRAMMAR REVIEW: a refresher unit--review of the speaking, writing, reading and listening skills and grammar points with emphasis on pronouns, prepositions and modifiers.

FRENCH CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HUMANITIES: an investigation into the areas of French art, music, philosophy and religion.

FRENCH COOKING: a study of French foods, cuisine and table manners.

A TRIP IN FRANCE: a tour of France, a region of France or a French city.

TEENAGERS IN FRANCE TODAY: research on the customs and interests of the French teenager.

CONTEMPORARY FRENCH READINGS: the reading of contemporary works of French literature.

FRENCH SPEAKING COLONIES: finding information on the various counties influenced by the French people.

WHO'S WHO IN FRANCE: a study of past and present figures of renown in France or associated with France.

BASIC SKILLS AND GRAMMAR REVIEW: a refresher unit--review of the speaking, writing, reading and listening skills and grammar points with emphasis on nouns and verbs.

THE HISTORY OF FRANCE: exploring the major periods of development in French history.

WRITING AND UNDERSTANDING FRENCH CORRESPONDANCE: investigation of French letter writing, penmanship, greeting cards, etc.

FRANCE TODAY: a study of the "now scene" in France.

FRENCH CINEMA AND NEWS MEDIA: examination of French radio, newspapers, magazines, television and cinema.

READINGS IN BEGINNING FRENCH LITERATURE: sample readings of French literature from its beginnings to the 1900's.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF FRANCE: topographical survey of France.

RECREATION IN FRANCE: an examination of leisure time in France.

VI. Student Orientation to Advanced French

1. Who can enroll in Advanced French?

   All the Advanced French units will be open to any student who has completed French II.

2. How many "units" may I take?

   a) You may take any number of units during the times which they are scheduled and receive 1/8 credit per unit for your work.

   b) You may take all eight units (enroll for the entire year) and receive 1 full credit for your work.

   c) You will be encouraged to begin each cycle with the Basic Skills and Grammar Review unit.

   d) If you do not take the unit being offered during a given period of time, you will be assigned to and must report to the Study Hall.

3. What will I do in Advanced French?

   Basically the year will be divided into eight units. For each unit you will:

   a) be allowed "to research" whatever aspect of that topic which interests you. You will write up briefly your intentions on an Application for Independent Study Project and schedule an interview with your teacher to discuss your project. Once the project is designed and accepted, you will report to the room each day, as all the resources are located there, and work independently on your project. At the conclusion of the unit, you will be expected to do something--cook a meal, play a game, give a report--in French which will be the result of your study. The "presentation" will be required of each student and thus you will have an opportunity to share with and learn from the other students. Some kind of appropriate written and oral product will be expected from you in conjunction with each unit.

   b) do some lab work related to your project one day each week. The tapes or records you will use will be selected and assignments agreed upon after you organize your project.

   c) study one grammar point per unit. Study this grammar concept to the extent you feel necessary. Midway through the unit you will be given a test (no grade). The test results will let you know if you understand the materials, and if not, what you need to study further. After a re-study period, you may take a final test (to be graded) whenever you are ready.

4. Where will I find the materials for my project?

The materials you will be using will be kept in the library of the "French room". A complete list of these resources will be given to you. Other materials might be found in the school's library. Still other resources could be found in neighboring city libraries. You also might wish to contact local colleges and universities and publishing companies to obtain information for your project.

5. How will I be graded?

Your grade for each marking period will be based on the following:

1. for the nine week grade
   a. your project(s) (approximate value--4/6)
   b. your lab work (approximate value--1/6)
   c. your final test(s) on the grammar concept(s) (approximate value--1/6)

2. for the semester grade--
   a. your two nine-week grades (approximate value--4/5)
   b. a semester test (approximate value--1/5)

This test will cover listening comprehension, reading comprehension, pronunciation, and free composition and the grammar point studied for each unit.

VII. Application For Independent Study Project

1. I propose to complete the following project(s) for this unit:

2. The purpose of my project(s) is (are):

3. The procedure I will follow is:

4. I will offer the following evidence as the product of my study:

Signed _____

Date _____